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MR. FOX's LETTER

TO THE

ELECTORS OF WESTMINSTER.

BRITISH MUSEUM
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JUN

A

LETTER

FROM THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

CHARLES JAMES FOX,

TO THE

WORTHY AND INDEPENDENT

ELECTORS

OF THE

CITY and LIBERTY of WESTMINSTER.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED FOR P. WOGAN, P. BYRNE, J. MILLIKEN, W. PORTER, J. MOORE, W. JONES, AND H. WATTS.

1793.

BRITISH MUSEUM
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JUN

A

LETTER, &c.

TO vote in ſmall minorities is a misfortune to which I have been ſo much accuſtomed, that I cannot be expected to feel it very acutely.

To be the object of calumny and miſrepreſentation gives me uneaſineſs, it is true, but an uneaſineſs not wholly unmixed with pride and ſatisfaction, ſince the experience of all ages and countries teaches that calumny and miſrepreſentation are frequently the moſt unequivocal teſtimonies of the zeal, and poſſibly the effect, with which he

 againſt

againſt whom they are directed has ſerved the public.

But I am informed that I now labour under a misfortune of a far different nature from theſe, and which can excite no other ſenſations than thoſe of concern and humiliation. I am told that you in general diſapprove my late conduct, and that, even among thoſe whoſe partiality to me was moſt conſpicuous, there are many who, when I am attacked upon the preſent occaſion, profeſs themſelves neither able nor willing to defend me.

That your unfavourable opinion of me (if in fact you entertain any ſuch) is owing to miſrepreſentation, I can have no doubt. To do away the effect of this miſrepreſentation is the object of this letter, and I know of no mode by which I can accompliſh this

object

object at once ſo fairly, and (as I hope) ſo effectually, as by ſtating to you the different motions which I made in the Houſe of Commons in the firſt days of this ſeſſion, together with the motives and arguments which induced me to make them.——On the firſt day I moved the Houſe to ſubſtitute, in place of the Addreſs, the following Amendment:

"To expreſs to his Majeſty our moſt
"zealous attachment to the excellent con-
"ſtitution of this free country, our ſenſe
"of the invaluable bleſſings which are de-
"rived from it, and our unſhaken deter-
"mination to maintain and preſerve it.····
"To aſſure His Majeſty, that uniting with
"all His Majeſty's faithful ſubjects in thoſe
"ſentiments of loyalty to the Throne, and
"attachment to the Conſtitution, we feel in
"common with them the deepeſt anxiety

" and concern, when we ſee thoſe meaſures
" adopted by the Executive Government,
" which the law authorizes only in caſes of
" inſurrection within this realm.

" That His Majeſty's faithful Commons,
" aſſembled in a manner new and alarming
" to the country, think it their firſt duty,
" and will make it their firſt buſineſs, to
" inform themſelves of the cauſes of this
" meaſure, being equally zealous to enforce
" a due obedience to the laws on the one
" hand, and a faithful execution of them
" on the other."

My motive for this meaſure was, that I thought it highly important, both in a conſtitutional and a prudential view, that the Houſe ſhould be thoroughly informed of the ground of calling out the militia, and

of

of its own meeting, before it proceeded upon other buſineſs.

The Law enables the King, in certain caſes, by the advice of his Privy Council, having previouſly declared the cauſe, to call forth the militia—and poſitively enjoins, that, whenever ſuch a meaſure is taken, Parliament ſhall be ſummoned immediately.

This law, which provided that we ſhould meet, ſeemed to me to point out to us our duty when met, and to require of us, if not by its letter, yet by a fair interpretation of its ſpirit, to make it our firſt buſineſs, to examine into the cauſes, that had been ſtated in the Proclamation as the motives for exerciſing an extraordinary power lodged in the Crown for extraordinary occacaſions; to aſcertain whether they were true

true in fact, and whether, if true, they were of ſuch a nature as to warrant the proceeding that had been grounded on them.

Such a mode of conduct, if right upon general principles, appeared to me peculiarly called for by the circumſtances under which we were aſſembled; and by the ambiguity with which the cauſes of reſorting for the firſt time to this prerogative were ſtated and defended.

The inſurrections (it was ſaid) at Yarmouth, Shields, and other places, gave Miniſters a legal right to act; and the general ſtate of the country, independently of theſe inſurrections, made it expedient for them to avail themſelves of this right. In other words, inſurrection was the *pretext*, the general ſtate of the country the *cauſe* of the meaſure.

ſure. Yet inſurrection was the motive ſtated in the Proclamation; and the Act of Parliament enjoins the diſcloſure, not of the pretext, but of the cauſe: ſo that it appeared to be doubtful whether even the letter of the law had been obeyed; but if it had, to this mode of profeſſing one motive and acting upon another, however agreeable to the habits of ſome men, I thought it my duty to diſſuade the Houſe of Commons from giving any ſanction or countenance whatever.

In a prudential view, ſurely information ought to precede judgment; and we were bound to know what really was the ſtate of the country, before we delivered our opinion of it in the Addreſs. Whenever the Houſe is called upon to declare an opinion of this nature, the weight which ought to belong to ſuch a declaration, makes it highly important

important that it ſhould be founded on the moſt authentic information, and that it ſhould be clear and diſtinct. Did the Houſe mean to approve the meaſure taken by Adminiſtration, upon the ground of the public pretence of inſurrections? If ſo, they were bound to have before them the facts relative to thoſe inſurrections, to the production of which no objection could be ſtated. Did they mean by their Addreſs to declare that the general ſituation of the country was in itſelf a juſtification of what had been done? Upon this ſuppoſition, it appeared to me equally neceſſary for them ſo to inform themſelves, as to enable them to ſtate with preciſion to the public the circumſtances in this ſituation to which they particularly adverted. If they ſaw reaſon to fear impending tumults and inſurrections, of which the danger was imminent and preſſing, the meaſures of His Majeſty's

jeſty's Miniſters might be well enough adapted to ſuch an exigency; but ſurely the evidence of ſuch a danger was capable of being ſubmitted either to the Houſe or to a Secret Committee; and of its exiſtence without ſuch evidence, no man could think it becoming for ſuch a body as the Houſe of Commons to declare their belief.

If therefore the Addreſs was to be founded upon either of the ſuppoſitions above ſtated, a previous enquiry was abſolutely neceſſary. But there were ſome whoſe apprehenſions were directed not ſo much to any inſurrections, either actually exiſting or immediately impending, as to the progreſs of what are called French opinions, propagated (as is ſuppoſed) with induſtry, and encouraged by ſucceſs; and to the miſchiefs which might in future time ariſe from the ſpirit of diſobedience and diſorder, which theſe doctrines are calculated to inſpire.

This danger, they ſaid, was too notorious to require proof; its reality could better be aſcertained by the ſeparate obſervations of individual members, than by any proceeding which the Houſe could inſtitute in its collective capacity; and upon this ground, therefore, the Addreſs might be ſafely voted, without any previous enquiry.

To have laid any ground for approving without examination, was a great point gained for thoſe who wiſhed to applaud the conduct of Adminiſtration; but in this inſtance I fear the foundation has been laid, without due regard to the nature of the ſuperſtructure, which it is intended to ſupport; for, if the danger conſiſt in falſe but ſeducing theories, and our apprehenſions be concerning what ſuch theories may in proceſs of time produce, to ſuch an evil it is difficult to conceive how any of the meaſures which have been purſued are in any degree

gree applicable. Opinions muſt have taken the ſhape of overt acts, before they can be reſiſted by the fortifications in the Tower; and the ſudden embodying of the Militia, and the drawing of the regular troops to the capital, ſeem to me meaſures calculated to meet an immediate, not a diſtant miſchief.

Impreſſed with theſe ideas I could no more vote upon this laſt vague reaſon, than upon thoſe of a more definite nature; ſince, if in one caſe the premiſes wanted proof, in the other, where proof was ſaid to be ſuperfluous, the concluſion was not juſt. If the majority of the Houſe thought differently from me, and if this laſt ground of general apprehenſion of future evils (the only one of all that were ſtated, upon which it could with any colour of reaſon be pretended that evidence was not both practicable and neceſſary), appeared to them to

juſtify the meaſures of Government; then I ſay they ought to have declared explicitly the true meaning of their vote, and either to have diſclaimed diſtinctly any belief in thoſe impending tumults and inſurrections, which had filled the minds of ſo many thouſands of our fellow ſubjects with the moſt anxious apprehenſions; or to have commenced an inquiry concerning them, the reſult of which would have enabled the Houſe to lay before the public a true and authentic ſtate of the nation, to put us upon our guard againſt real perils, and to diſſipate chimerical alarms.

I am aware that there were ſome perſons who thought that to be upon our guard was ſo much our firſt intereſt, in the preſent poſture of affairs, that even to conceal the truth was leſs miſchievous than to diminiſh the public terror. They dreaded inquiry, leſt it ſhould produce light; they felt

felt ſo ſtrongly the advantage of obſcurity in inſpiring terror, that they overlooked its other property of cauſing real peril. They were ſo alive to the dangers belonging to falſe ſecurity, that they were inſenſible to thoſe ariſing from groundleſs alarms.——In this frame of mind they might for a moment forget that integrity and ſincerity ought ever to be the characteriſtic virtues of a Britiſh Houſe of Commons; and while they were compelled to admit that the Houſe could not, without inquiry, profeſs its belief of dangers, which (if true) might be ſubſtantiated by evidence, they might nevertheleſs be unwilling that the ſalutary alarm (for ſuch they deemed it) ariſing from theſe ſuppoſed dangers in the minds of the people, ſhould be wholly quieted. What they did not themſelves credit, they might wiſh to be believed by others. Dangers, which they conſidered as diſtant,

they

they were not diſpleaſed that the public ſhould ſuppoſe near, in order to excite more vigorous exertions.

To theſe ſyſtems of crooked policy and pious fraud I have always entertained a kind of inſtinctive and invincible repugnance; and, if I had nothing elſe to advance in defence of my conduct but this feeling, of which I cannot diveſt myſelf, I ſhould be far from fearing your diſpleaſure. But are there, in truth, no evils in a falſe alarm, beſides the diſgrace attending thoſe who are concerned in propagating it? Is it nothing to deſtroy peace, harmony and confidence, among all ranks of citizens? Is it nothing to give a general credit and countenance to ſuſpicions, which every man may point as his worſt paſſions incline him? In ſuch a ſtate, all political animoſities are inflamed. We confound the miſtaken ſpeculatiſt with the deſperate incendiary. We extend the prejudices which we have conceived againſt

individuals to the political party or even to the religious ſect of which they are members. In this ſpirit a Judge declared from the bench, in the laſt century, that poiſoning was a Popiſh trick, and I ſhould not be ſuſpriſed if Biſhops were now to preach from the pulpit that ſedition is a Preſbyterian or a Unitarian vice. Thoſe who differ from us in their ideas of the conſtitution, in this paroxyſm of alarm we conſider as confederated to deſtroy it. Forbearance and toleration have no place in our minds; for who can tolerate opinions, which, according to what the Deluders teach, and rage and fear incline the Deluded to believe, attack our Lives, our Properties, and our Religion?

This ſituation I thought it my duty, if poſſible, to avert, by promoting an inquiry. By this meaſure the guilty, if ſuch there are, would have been detected, and the innoliberated from ſuſpicion.

My

My propoſal was rejected by a great majority. I defer with all due reſpect to their opinion, but retain my own.

My next motion was for the inſertion of the following words into the Addreſs:---"Truſting that your Majeſty will employ "every means of negotiation, conſiſtent "with the honour and ſafety of this coun-"try, to avert the calamities of war."

My motive in this inſtance is too obvious to require explanation; and I think it the leſs neceſſary to dwell much on this ſubject, becauſe, with reſpect to the deſirableneſs of peace at all times, and more particularly in the preſent, I have reaſon to believe that your ſentiments do not differ from mine. If we looked to the country where the cauſe of war was ſaid principally to originate, the ſituation of the United Provinces appeared to me to furniſh abundance of prudential argu-

arguments in favour of peace. If we looked to Ireland, I ſaw nothing there that would not diſcourage a wiſe ſtateſman from putting the connection between the two kingdoms to any unneceſſary hazard. At home, if it be true that there are ſeeds of diſcontent, War is the hot-bed in which theſe ſeeds will ſooneſt vegetate; and of all wars, in this point of view, that war is moſt to be dreaded, in the cauſe of which Kings may be ſuppoſed to be more concerned than their ſubjects.

I wiſhed, therefore, moſt earneſtly for peace; and experience had taught me, that the voice even of a Minority in the Houſe of Commons, might not be wholly without effect, in deterring the King's Miniſters from irrational projects of war. Even upon this occaſion, if I had been more ſupported, I am perſuaded our chance of preſerving the bleſſings of peace would be better than it appears to be at preſent.

I come now to my third motion, "That an humble addreſs be preſented "to his Majeſty, that his Majeſty will be "graciouſly pleaſed to give directions, that "a Miniſter may be ſent to Paris, to treat "with thoſe perſons who exerciſe provi-"ſionally the functions of executive go-"vernment in France, touching ſuch points "as may be in diſcuſſion between his Ma-"jeſty, and his Allies, and the French Na-"tion;" which, if I am rightly informed, is that which has been moſt generally diſ-approved. It was made upon mature conſideration, after much deliberation with myſelf, and much conſultation with others; and notwithſtanding the various miſrepreſentations of my motives in making it, and the miſconceptions of its tendency, which have prepoſſeſſed many againſt it, I cannot repent of an act, which, if I had omitted, I ſhould think myſelf deficient in the duty

which I owe to you, and to my country at large.

The motives which urged me to make it were, the ſame deſire of peace which actuated me in the former motion, if it could be preſerved on honourable and ſafe terms, and if this were impoſſible, an anxious wiſh that the grounds of war might be juſt, clear, and intelligible.

If we or our ally have ſuffered injury or inſult, or if the independence of Europe be menaced by inordinate and ſucceſsful ambition, I know no means of preſerving peace but by obtaining reparation for the injury, ſatisfaction for the inſult, or ſecurity againſt the deſign, which we apprehend; and I know no means of obtaining

any of theſe objects but by addreſſing ourſelves to the power of whom we complain.

If the excluſive navigation of the Scheld, or any other right belonging to the States General, has been invaded, the French Executive Council are the invaders, and of them we muſt aſk redreſs. If the rights of neutral nations have been attacked by the decree of the 19th of November, the National Convention of France have attacked them, and from that Convention, through the organ by which they ſpeak to foreign courts and nations, their Miniſter for foreign affairs, we muſt demand explanation, diſavowal, or ſuch other ſatisfaction as the caſe may require. If the manner in which the ſame Convention have received and anſwered ſome of our countrymen,

men, who have addreſſed them, be thought worthy notice, preciſely of the ſame perſons, and in the ſame manner, muſt we demand ſatisfaction upon that head alſo. If the ſecurity of Europe, by any conqueſts made or apprehended, be endangered to ſuch a degree, as to warrant us, on the principles as well of juſtice as of policy, to enforce by arms a reſtitution of conqueſts already made, or a renunciation of ſuch as may have been projected, from the Executive Power of France, in this inſtance again, muſt we aſk ſuch reſtitution, or ſuch renunciation. How all, or any of theſe objects could be attained, but by negociation, carried on by authoriſed Miniſters, I could not conceive. I knew indeed that there were ſome perſons, whoſe notions of dignity were far different from mine, and who, in that point of view, would have preferred a clandeſtine, to an avowed

nego-

negociation; but I confeſs I thought this mode of proceeding neither honourable nor ſafe; and, with regard to ſome of our complaints, wholly impracticable.——Not honourable, becauſe, to ſeek private and circuitous channels of communication, ſeems to ſuit the conduct, rather of ſuch as ſue for a favour, than of a great nation, which demands ſatisfaction. Not ſafe, becauſe neither a declaration from an unauthoriſed agent, nor a mere gratuitous repeal of the decrees complained of, (and what more could ſuch a negociation aim at?) would afford us any ſecurity againſt the revival of the claims which we oppoſe; and laſtly, impracticable with reſpect to that part of the queſtion, which regards the ſecurity of Europe, becauſe ſuch ſecurity could not be provided for by the repeal of a decree, or any thing that might be the reſult of a private negotiation, but could only be obtained

tained by a formal treaty, to which the exiſting French government muſt of neceſſity be a party; and I know of no means by which it can become a party to ſuch a treaty, or to any treaty at all, but by a Miniſter publicly authoriſed, and publicly received. Upon theſe grounds, and with theſe views, as a ſincere friend to peace, I thought it my duty to ſuggeſt, what appeared to me, on every ſuppoſition, the moſt eligible, and, if certain points were to be inſiſted upon, the only means of preſerving that invaluable bleſſing.

But I had ſtill a further motive; and if peace could not be preſerved, I conſidered the meaſure which I recommended as highly uſeful in another point of view. To declare war, is, by the Conſtitution, the prerogative of the King; but to grant

or with-hold the means of carrying it on, is (by the ſame Conſtitution) the privilege of the People, through their Repreſentatives; and upon the People at large, by a law paramount to all Conſtitutions—the Law of Nature and Neceſſity, muſt fall the burdens and ſufferings, which are the too ſure attendants upon that calamity. It ſeems therefore reaſonable that they, who are to pay, and to ſuffer, ſhould be diſtinctly informed of the object for which war is made, and I conceived nothing would tend to this information ſo much as an avowed negociation; becauſe from the reſult of ſuch a negociation, and by no other means, could we, with any degree of certainty, learn, how far the French were willing to ſatisfy us in all, or any of the points, which have been publicly held forth as the grounds of complaint againſt them.—If in none of

theſe

theſe any ſatisfactory explanation were given, we ſhould all admit, provided our original grounds of complaint were juſt, that the war would be ſo too:—if in ſome—we ſhould know the ſpecific ſubjects upon which ſatisfaction was refuſed, and have an opportunity of judging whether or not they were a rational ground of diſpute:—if in all—and a rupture were nevertheleſs to take place, we ſhould know that the public pretences were not the real cauſes of the war.

In the laſt caſe which I have put, I ſhould hope there is too much ſpirit in the people of Great Britain, to ſubmit to take a part in a proceeding founded on deceit; and in either of the others, whether our cauſe were weak or ſtrong, we ſhould at all events eſcape that laſt of infamies, the ſuſpicion of being a party to the Duke of

Brunſwick's Manifeſtoes *. But this is not all. Having aſcertained the preciſe cauſe of war, we ſhould learn the true road to peace; and if the cauſe ſo aſcertained appeared adequate, then we ſhould look for peace through war, by vigorous exertions and liberal ſupplies: if inadequate, the Con-

* I have heard that the Manifeſtoes are not to be conſidered as the acts of the Illuſtrious Prince whoſe name I have mentioned, and that the threats contained in them were never meant to be carried into execution. I hear with great ſatisfaction whatever tends to palliate the Manifeſtoes themſelves; and with ſtill more any thing that tends to diſconnect them from the name which is affixed to them, becauſe the great abilities of the perſon in queſtion, his extraordinary gallantry, and above all his mild and paternal government of his ſubjects, have long ſince impreſſed me with the higheſt reſpect for his character; and upon this account it gave me much concern when I heard that he was engaged in an enterprize, where, according to my ideas, true glory could not be acquired.

ſtitution

ſtitution would furniſh us abundance of means, as well through our repreſentatives, as by our undoubted right to petition King and Parliament, of impreſſing his Majeſty's Miniſters with ſentiments ſimilar to our own, and of engaging them to compromiſe, or, if neceſſary, to relinquiſh an object, in which we did not feel intereſt ſufficient to compenſate to us for the calamities and hazard of a war.

To theſe reaſonings it appeared to me, that they only could object with conſiſtency, who would go to war with France on account of her internal concerns; and who would conſider the re-eſtabliſhment of the old, or at leaſt ſome other form of government, as the fair object of the conteſt. Such perſons might reaſonably enough argue, that with thoſe whom they are determined to deſtroy, it is uſeleſs to treat.

To

To arguments of this nature, however, I paid little attention; becauſe the eccentric opinion upon which they are founded was expreſsly diſavowed, both in the King's Speech and in the Addreſſes of the two Houſes of Parliament: and it was an additional motive with me for making my motion, that, if fairly debated, it might be the occaſion of bringing into free diſcuſſion that opinion, and of ſeparating more diſtinctly thoſe who maintained and acted upon it from others, who from different motives (whatever they might be) were diſinclined to my propoſal.

But if the objections of the violent party appeared to me extravagant, thoſe of the more moderate ſeemed wholly unintelligible. Would they make and continue war, till they can force France to a counter-revolution? No; this they diſclaim. What then is to be the termination

mination of the war to which they would excite us? I anſwer confidently, that it can be no other than a negotiation, upon the ſame principles and with the ſame men as that which I recommend. I ſay the ſame principles, becauſe after war peace cannot be obtained but by treaty, and treaty neceſſarily implies the independency of the contracting parties. I ſay the ſame men, becauſe though they *may* be changed before the happy hour of reconciliation arrives, yet that change, upon the principles above ſtated, would be merely accidental, and in no wiſe a neceſſary preliminary to peace: for I cannot ſuppoſe that they who diſclaim making war *for* a change, would yet think it right to continue it *till* a change; or, in other words, that the blood and treaſure of this country ſhould be expended in a hope that—not our efforts—but time and chance may produce a new government in France, with which it would

be

be more agreeable to our Miniſters to negotiate than with the preſent. And it is further to be obſerved, that the neceſſity of ſuch a negotiation will not in any degree depend upon the ſucceſs of our arms, ſince the reciprocal recognition of the independency of contracting parties is equally neceſſary to thoſe who exact and to thoſe who offer ſacrifices for the purpoſe of peace. I forbear to put the caſe of ill ſucceſs, becauſe to contemplate the ſituation to which we, and eſpecially our ally, might in ſuch an event be placed, is a taſk too painful to be undertaken but in a caſe of the laſt neceſſity. Let us ſuppoſe therefore the ſkill and gallantry of our ſailors and ſoldiers to be crowned with a ſeries of uninterrupted victories, and thoſe victories to lead us to the legitimate object of a juſt war, a ſafe and honourable peace. The terms of ſuch a peace, (I am ſuppoſing that Great Britain

is

is. to dictate them) may conſiſt in ſatiſfaction, reſtitution, or even by way of indemnity to us or to others, in ceſſion of territory on the part of France. Now that ſuch ſatisfaction may be honourable, it muſt be made by an avowed Miniſter; that ſuch reſtitution or ceſſion may be ſafe or honourable, they muſt be made by an independent power, competent to make them. And thus our very ſucceſſes and victories will neceſſarily lead us to that meaſure of negotiation and recognition, which, from the diſtorted ſhape in which paſſion and prejudice repreſent objects to the mind of man, has by ſome been conſidered as an act of humiliation and abaſement.

I have reaſon to believe there are ſome who think my motion unexceptionable enough in itſelf, but ill-timed. The time was not in my choice. I had no opportunity

nity of making it ſooner; and, with a view, to its operation reſpecting peace, I could not delay it. To me, who think that public intercourſe with France, except during actual war, ought always to ſubſiſt, the firſt occaſion that preſented itſelf, after the interruption of that intercourſe, ſeemed of courſe the proper moment for preſſing its renewal. But let us examine the objections upon this head of Time in detail. They appeared to me to be principally Four——

1ſt. That by ſending a Miniſter to Paris at that period, we ſhould give ſome countenance to a proceeding*, moſt unanimouſly, and

* Since this was written, we have learned the ſad cataſtrophe of the proceeding to which I alluded.—Thoſe, however, who feel the force of my argument, will perceive that it is not at all impaired by this revolting act of cruelty and injuſtice. Indeed if I were inclined to ſee any connection between the two ſubjects, I ſhould rather feel additional regret for the rejection of

and moſt juſtly reprobated, in every country of Europe.

To this objection I need not, I think, give any other anſwer, than that it reſts upon an opinion, that by ſending a Miniſter we pay ſome compliment, implying approbation, to the prince or ſtate to whom we ſend him; an opinion which, for the honour of this country, I muſt hope to be wholly erroneous. We had a Miniſter at Verſailles, when Corſica was bought and enſlaved. We had Miniſters at the German courts, at the time of the infamous partition of Poland. We have generally a reſident Conſul, who acts as a Miniſter to the piratical republic or Algiers; and we have more than once ſent

of a motion which might have afforded one chance more o. preventing an act concerning which (out of France) I will venture to affirm that there is not throughout Europe one diſſentient voice

embaſſies to Emperors of Morocco, reeking from the blood through which, by the murder of their neareſt relations, they had waded to their thrones. In none of theſe inſtances was any ſanction given by Great Britain to the tranſactions by which power had been acquired, or to the manner in which it had been exerciſed.

2dly. That a recognition might more properly take place at the end, and as the reſult of a private communication, and (in the phraſe uſed upon a former occaſion) as the price of peace, than gratuitouſly at the outſet of a negotiation.

I cannot help ſuſpecting, that they who urge this objection have confounded the preſent caſe with the queſtion, formerly ſo much agitated, of American Independence. In this view they appear to me wholly diſ-

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ſimilar—I pray to God that, in all other reſpects, they may prove equally ſo. To recognize the Thirteen States, was in effect to withdraw a claim of our own, and it might fairly enough be argued that we were entitled to ſome price or compenſation for ſuch a ſacrifice. Even upon that occaſion, I was of opinion that a gratuitous and preliminary acknowledgment of their independence was moſt conſonant to the principles of magnanimity and policy; but in this inſtance we have no ſacrifice to make, for we have no claim; and the reaſons for which the French muſt wiſh an avowed and official intercourſe, can be only ſuch as apply equally to the mutual intereſt of both nations, by affording more effectual means of preventing miſunderſtandings, and ſecuring peace.

I would further recommend to thoſe who

preſs this objection, to conſider whether, if recognition be really a ſacrifice on our part, the Miniſtry have not already made that ſacrifice by continuing to act upon the commercial treaty as a treaty ſtill in force. Every contract muſt be at an end when the contracting parties have no longer any exiſtence either in their own perſons or by their repreſentatives. After the tenth of Auguſt the political exiſtence of Louis XVI. who was the contracting party in the treaty of commerce, was completely annihilated. The only queſtion therefore is, Whether the Executive Council of France did or did not repreſent the political power ſo annihilated. If we ſay they did not, the contracting party has no longer any political exiſtence either in his perſon or by repreſentation, and the treaty becomes null and void. If we ſay they did, then we have actually acknowledged them as repreſentatives, (for the time at leaſt) of what

what was the Executive Government in France. In this character alone do they claim to be acknowledged, ſince their very ſtyle deſcribes them as a Proviſional Executive Council and nothing elſe. If we would preſerve our treaty we could not do leſs; by ſending a Miniſter we ſhould not do more *.

3dly. That our ambaſſador having been recalled, and no Britiſh Miniſter having reſided at Paris, while the conduct of the

* If my argument is ſatisfactory, I have proved that we have recognized the Executive Council; and it is notorious, that through the medium of Mr. Chauvelin we have negotiated with them. But although we have both negotiated and recognized, it would be diſhonourable, it ſeems, to negotiate in ſuch a manner as to imply recognition. How nice are the points upon which great buſineſſes turn! how remote from vulgar apprehenſion!

French was inoffenſive with reſpect to us and our ally, it would be mortifying to ſend one thither, juſt at the time when they began to give us cauſe of complaint.

Mortifying to whom? Not certainly to the Houſe of Commons, who were not a party to the recall of Lord Gower, and who, if my advice were followed, would loſe no time in replacing him. To the Miniſters poſſibly *; and if ſo, it ought to be a warning to the Houſe, that it ſhould not, by acting like the Miniſters, loſe the proper, that is, the firſt opportunity, and thereby throw ex-

* I do not think it would have been mortifying even to them, becauſe in conſequence of the diſcuſſions which had ariſen, a meaſure which had been before indifferent might become expedient; but as this point made no part of my conſideration, I have not thought it incumbent upon me to argue it.

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trinſic difficulties of its own creation in the way of a meaſure, in itſelf wiſe and ſalutary.

4thly. That by acting in the manner propoſed we might give ground of offence to thoſe powers, with whom, in caſe of war, it might be prudent to form connection and alliance.

This objection requires examination. Is it meant that our treating with France in its preſent ſtate will offend the German Powers, by ſhewing them that our ground of quarrel is different from theirs? If this be ſo, and if we adhere to the principles which we have publicly ſtated, I am afraid me muſt either offend or deceive, and in ſuch an alternative I truſt the option is not difficult.

If it be ſaid, that, though our original grounds of quarrel were different, yet we may

may, in return for the aid they may afford us in obtaining our objects, aſſiſt them in theirs of a counter-revolution, and enter into an offenſive alliance for that purpoſe—I anſwer, that our having previouſly treated would be no impediment to ſuch a meaſure. But if it were, I freely confeſs that this conſideration would have no influence with me; becauſe ſuch an alliance, for ſuch a purpoſe, I conceive to be the greateſt calamity that can befall the Britiſh nation: for let us not attempt to deceive ourſelves; whatever poſſibility or even probability there may be of a counter-revolution, from internal agitation and diſcord, the means of producing ſuch an event by external force, can be no other than the conqueſt of France. The conquſt of France!!!—O! calumniated cruſaders, how rational and moderate were your objects —O! much injured Louis XIV. upon what ſlight grounds have

you

you been accuſed of reſtleſs and immoderate ambition!—O! tame and feeble Cervantes, with what a timid pencil and faint colours have you painted the portrait of a diſordered imagination!

I have now ſtated to you fully, and I truſt fairly, the arguments that perſuaded me to the courſe of conduct which I have purſued. In theſe conſiſts my defence, upon which you are to pronounce; and I hope I ſhall not be thought preſumptuous, when I ſay, that I expect with confidence a favourable verdict.

If the reaſonings which I have adduced fail of convincing you, I confeſs indeed that I ſhall be diſappointed, becauſe to my underſtanding they appear to have more of irrefragable demonſtration than can often be hoped for in political diſcuſſions; but even

in this caſe, if you ſee in them probability ſufficient to induce you to believe that, though not ſtrong enough to convince *you*, they, and not any ſiniſter or oblique motives, did in fact actuate *me*, I have ſtill gained my cauſe; for in this ſuppoſition, though the propriety of my conduct may be doubted, the rectitude of my intentions muſt be admitted.

Knowing therefore the juſtice and candour of the tribunal to which I have appealed, I wait your deciſion without fear—Your approbation I anxiouſly deſire, but your acquittal I confidently expect.

Pitied for my ſuppoſed miſconduct by ſome of my friends, openly renounced by others, attacked and miſrepreſented by my enemies,—to you I have recourſe for refuge and protection; and conſcious, that if I had

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ſhrunk from my duty, I ſhould have merited your cenſure, I feel myſelf equally certain, that by acting in conformity to the motives which I have explained to you, I can in no degree have forfeited the eſteem of the city of Weſtminſter, which it has ſo long been the firſt pride of my life to enjoy, and which it ſhall be my conſtant endeavour to preſerve.

C. J. FOX.

South Street, Jan. 26, 1793.

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